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(1) Editorial - U.S. Secretary of State Rice's visit to Japan: Time for Japan, U.S., ROK to work in closer cooperation

SANKEI (Page 2) (Full)
February 28, 2008

U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice is visiting Japan. Following her courtesy call on Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda and other Japanese leaders, she met with Foreign Minister Masahiko Koumura. After attending the inauguration of a new South Korean president and then traveling to China, she stopped over in Japan after a year and four months absence. Japan and the U.S. held their first foreign ministerial since last September, when Koumura was visiting the United States.

In South Korea, Rice met with new President Lee Myung Bak and reportedly the two leaders agreed to repair relations between the two countries. Meanwhile, Rice happens to be visiting Japan at a time when bilateral ties are basically in good shape but mutual distrust and doubts are on the other hand arising over the recent alleged rape of a junior high school girl by a U.S. Marine in Okinawa and the North Korea policy including the abduction issue.

We expect Japan and the U.S. in their long foreign ministerial yesterday would reach sufficient agreement not only on rebuilding bilateral ties based on specific steps but also on revamping cooperation among Japan, the U.S., South Korea, which share the same values.

In order to advance the North Korea policy as well as the security policy for Northeast Asia, Japan, the U.S., and South Korea vitally need to work in close cooperation, but trilateral cooperation has

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suffered a significant setback in the days of former South Korean President Roh Moo Hyun, who prioritized the so-called "sunshine policy" toward Pyongyang. Now is time for the three countries to rebuild a trilateral coalition.

Coincidentally, America's prestigious New York Philharmonic Orchestra was invited to North Korea and held its first concert in Pyongyang. If the North Koreans wanted to use this concert to impress the rest of the world as the icy relations between the U.S. and North Korea thawing out, that would have been their miscalculation. No one sides with the pro-Pyongyang General Association of Korean Residents in Japan's (Chongryon) organ paper's analysis saying that that concert ushers in a reorganization of international order in Northeast Asia and the international situation.

The U.S. government allowed the NY Philharmonic to perform in the North, but U.S. White House Press Secretary Perino condemned North Korea for its suppression of human rights, noting: "We must not forget that North Korea has systems that treat people in a cruel manner, and that the people of that country do not live a free and affluent life because of starvation and coercion."

Referring to the Six-Party Talks, Rice played up her stance of urging Pyongyang to come up with a complete and correct declaration of its uranium enrichment programs over the proliferation of nuclear weapons. But we hope to see her reaffirm that an easy removal of North Korea from America's list of state sponsors of terrorism could seriously damage the trust relationship between Japan and the U.S.

Japanese leaders exchanged views also on China policy with Rice, who came here after her tour of China. Japan and the U.S. need to boost their cooperation in strategic terms to deal with such issues as Taiwan in the future, as well, given that China is markedly gaining power in military and economic areas.

(2) Editorial: Secretary Rice's visit to Japan -- Steady efforts needed to maintain Japan-U.S. alliance

YOMIURI (Page 3) (Full)
February 28, 2008

In order to maintain the Japan-U.S. alliance, close dialogue and steady efforts by both parties are indispensable. U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice's visit to Japan can be seen as part of such efforts.

In her meetings with Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda, Foreign Minister Masahiko Koumura, and Defense Minister Shigeru Ishiba, Rice apologized over the alleged rape of a junior high school girl in Okinawa by a U.S. Marine. She also stressed that the United States would do its utmost in cooperation with Japan to prevent a recurrence of similar incidents.

The Japanese government and U.S. forces in Japan have announced "interim measures" to prevent crimes committed by U.S. military personnel in Japan. The measures include: announcing the number of U.S. military personnel who live on and off military bases, and the screening criteria for allowing individuals to live off base; implementing patrols conducted jointly by the U.S. forces and local governments; and installing security cameras.

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As effective steps, more importantly, improving educational programs to discipline young U.S. military members may be necessary.

The U.S. Marine Corps requires its personnel to take a two-day seminar on the Japan-U.S. Status of Forces Agreement, and the culture of Okinawa Prefecture when they first arrive at their bases in the prefecture. But the one-time only course is insufficient. It is necessary to hold such seminars more regularly to educate U.S. military personnel that incidents could potentially impair the Japan-U.S. alliance.

Ishiba and Rice reaffirmed that Tokyo and Washington would proceed steadily with the realignment of U.S. forces in Japan, which the two sides agreed in May 2006.

Iwakuni City in Yamaguchi Prefecture is expected to agree to accept the plan to relocate U.S. carrier-based aircraft from the U.S. Atsugi Naval Base in Kanagawa Prefecture to the U.S. Marine Corps' Iwakuni air Station since the mayor opposing the plan was defeated by a candidate in favor of it in the recent mayoral election. In a bid to ease the burden of the U.S. military bases on its residents, Okinawa Prefecture should respond to the relocation of the U.S. Marine Corps' Futenma air station to another location within the prefecture in a positive manner. If 8,000 U.S. Marines in Okinawa move to Guam, it might lead to preventing misconducts and crimes committed by U.S. military personnel.

Regarding the North Korean nuclear issue, Tokyo and Washington agreed through a series of talks to strengthen the trilateral partnership between Japan, the United States, and South Korea, which was stalled under the government of former South Korean President Roh Moo Hyun. The three countries will carry out coordination to frequently hold director general-level meetings from now on.

North Korea has refused to provide a "complete and correct declaration of all its nuclear programs. It is important that China, which chairs the six-party talks, plays a more constructive role.

Before arriving in Japan, Rice held talks with her Chinese counterpart in Beijing. She urged China, which provide energy and other resources to North Korea, to use all its possible influence on Pyongyang. Japan also needs fortify its ties with China to help bring about a mutually beneficial relationship.

The Japan-U.S. alliance must take the strategic step of promoting China, which is rapidly becoming a superpower, to take a responsible role as a member of the international community.

China's military budget has exhibited double-digit growth for 19 consecutive years. Improving the transparency of that nation's military capabilities and defense policy is absolutely necessary for regional stability in Asia. China also must abide by international regulations on intellectual property rights and trade, and take

steps to guarantee the safety of its exported food products.

Japan and the United States should closely cooperate to persuade China.

(3) Citizen's group stages protest movement against U.S. consul general outside window (of coffee shop)

RYUKYU SHIMPO (Page 27) (Abridged)

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February 28, 2008

Photo of protestors with banner reading in English, "Maher, get out of Okinawa"

In response to the incident of a junior high school girl being raped by a U.S. serviceman, the Okinawa Citizens' Network to Seek World Peace on Feb. 27 held a protest against the U.S. Consulate General in Okinawa in Urasoe City. Since Consul General Kevin Maher, prior to the protest movement, had gone out to a restaurant close by, one of the Network members reacted sharply, saying, "He would not respond to our protest, and went out to eat." The front of the restaurant then became the scene in which the group repeatedly shouted out (at Maher inside). The protest activity was scheduled to begin at one o'clock that afternoon. About 40 minutes before that, Maher, accompanied by several other persons went out. Network co-leader Natsume Taira tried to talk to him, but the Consul General waved him aside and continued to the restaurant several hundred meters away.

After that, the Consul General moved from the restaurant to a nearby coffee shop, but the Network members, having passed along their protest letter to a staffer at the consulate general, move to the front of the shop. For about 40 minutes, they stood outside the glass window shouting out (at Maher). An alarmed policeman followed them over to deal with the situation, and shoppers and drivers were staring at the scene with alarmed faces.

The reason why Representative Taira did not get a meeting with Consul General Maher was the fact that he had been arrested for disturbing the peace while engaged in a protest act in 2006. Maher said, "Mr. Taira said he wanted to hand over the protest letter by himself, but I thought that if I met someone who had carried out an improper protest, we could not have a cool-headed discussion."

Taira rebutted the Consul General by saying: "To bring up my arrest record shows a lack of human rights awareness. I requested a meeting on behalf of the Network, but since I could not get on his schedule, the handing over of the protest letter was limited to one person."

(4) Okinawa citizens group stages protests against U.S. Consul General Maher, while drinking coffee at a shop, for being "too busy" to meet them

OKINAWA TIMES (Page 23) (Full)
February 28, 2008

An Okinawan citizens group yesterday visited the U.S. consulate general in Naha to protest the series of sexual assaults by U.S. military personnel. The group spotted at a coffee shop nearby Consul General Kevin Maher, who had refused to meet the group, citing he was "too busy". The group then staged a protest right there, holding up a banner in front of the coffee shop, causing an uproar. Okinawa Citizens' Network to Seek World Peace co-leader Taira criticized Maher, saying: "He makes fools of prefectoral residents. He should have spared some time to meet the group."

The Network sought in advance a meeting with Maher, but as spokesperson at the consulate general reportedly said: "We want you to mail us your protest note. The consul general cannot spare the time since he is very busy." Taira said in a strong tone: "We arranged the meeting to hand over the protest note to the consul

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general."

The U.S. consulate spokesperson, however, said: "The group did not have an appointment (to meet the consul general)." The consulate general spokesperson, questioned by the Okinawa Times, said: "The consul general does not meet those who have been arrested for an illegal protest." Mr. Taira, who was once arrested for his action to prevent the construction of a base but never prosecuted, fiercely reacted, saying: "I know now how lacking he is in awareness of human rights."

Okinawa Human Rights Association Secretary General Nagayoshi said: "It is inconceivable to reject a meeting because someone who requested it was once arrested. The incident exposes well the true nature of base power."

(5) Defense Minister Ishiba in hot seat

YOMIURI (Page 3) (Excerpts)
February 28, 2008

Vice-Defense Minister Kohei Masuda held a press conference last night regarding the fact that the Ministry of Defense (MOD) had questioned the chief navigator of the MSDF Aegis destroyer Atago that collided with a small fishing boat (on Feb. 19) before investigations by the Japan Coast Guard (JCG). In the press meeting, Masuda admitted the possibility that the MSDF had provided the ministry with false information. Defense Minister Shigeru Ishiba, who has repeatedly indicated that he would not hesitate to resign if there were any cover-ups, now stands at bay.

In the press conference last night, a reporter asked Masuda, "Do you think there was some falsehood in the Defense Ministry's explanations?" In response, Vice-Minister Masuda said: "I cannot rule out that possibility."

Earlier, yesterday morning, Defense Minister Ishiba attended a Lower House Budget Committee sub-panel meeting in which he said: "The Defense Ministry questioned the Atago's chief navigator without obtaining approval from the Japan Coast Guard, and it was not necessarily appropriate." He thus indicated that MOD had not obtained endorsement from the JCG before quizzing the navigator, reversing its previous explanation.

On Feb. 22, Ishiba declared before the Lower House Security Committee: "If there was any manipulation of information, I will take responsibility as cabinet minister."

MOD previously explained that MSDF Yokosuka Regional Headquarters had obtained approval from JCG Yokosuka district headquarters about questioning the navigator. But the 3rd Regional Japan Coast Guard Headquarters overseeing Yokosuka district headquarters denied such a report in advance.

To begin with, there has been strong criticism in the government, ruling coalition, and even in MOD about the fact that the ministry called the chief navigator to its headquarters in Ichigaya before the JCG launched an investigation. "They could be accused of having made arrangements to obstruct the investigation and tell the same story," an LDP lawmaker with ties to national defense interests noted.

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The chief navigator was questioned by some 10 MOD and SDF executives, including Defense Minister Ishiba, Vice-Minister Masuda, SDF Joint Staff Chief Takashi Saito, and MSDF Chief of Staff Eiji Yoshikawa. Ishiba did not reveal that he had questioned the navigator himself until he was asked by Kiyomi Tsujimoto of the Social Democratic Party at a Lower House Security Committee meeting on Feb. 26.

Some have even begun to question if Ishiba has what it takes to be defense minister, with a government source saying: "The defense minister is deeply hurt because of his own acts. As chief of the

crisis management office, he should handle matters more cautiously."

In the wake of Masuda's press conference last night, some in the ruling camp, which has predominantly been defensive of Ishiba, have begun whispering of his voluntary resignation. An Upper House LDP executive said to reporters last night: "If Mr. Ishiba wants to step down after the cause and other facts become clear, that cannot be helped."

Meanwhile, Chief Cabinet Secretary Machimura indicated at a press briefing last evening that MOD had not attempted to tell the same story, saying: "In my view, the defense minister did not have any intention to cover up matters. As cabinet minister responsible for the matter, it might be natural to be driven by the desire to get to know the circumstances firsthand." At the same time, Machimura said: "As for MOD's response to the accident, it should have taken action after discussing the matter with the Japan Coast Guard first."

(6) Pressure on Ishiba growing over destroyer collision blunders

NIKKEI (Page 3) (Full)
February 28, 2008

One week after the collision between the Maritime Self-Defense Force (MSDF) Aegis destroyer Atago and a fishing vessel, a number of the Defense Ministry's improper responses have been exposed in succession. The ministry has altered its explanations again and again, including one about when the fishing boat was first spotted. It has also been revealed that Defense Minister Shigeru Ishiba and others had questioned the navigating officer of the destroyer but had not announced they had carried such out. The opposition bloc is calling on the defense minister to resign, with one lawmaker remarking: "It is suspected that he tried to cover up unfavorable facts about the accident." Pressure on Ishiba is growing stronger.

Ishiba approves inappropriateness

In a subcommittee meeting of the House of Representatives Budget Committee meeting yesterday, Defense Minister Ishiba admitted that he had questioned the navigating chief of the Atago at the defense minister's office without the Japan Coast Guard's (JCG) permission on the morning of Feb. 19, saying: "It was inappropriate." In a press conference on Feb. 26, MSDF's Chief of Staff Eiji Yoshikawa said: "We obtained approval (from the Japan Coast Guard) before 10:00 a.m. of Feb. 19." But the 3rd Regional Coast Guard Headquarters later explained that the Defense Ministry contacted the JCG central office in the afternoon," contradicting what Yoshikawa said.

In a news conference urgently held at the Defense Ministry last

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night, Vice Defense Minister Kohei Masuda withdrew the explanation the ministry had earlier made about the ministry's notification to the JCG, saying: "It cannot be confirmed." Masuda did not deny the possibility that the ministry had given a false account.

It has also been learned that the defense minister questioned the navigating officer, who had arrived at the Defense Ministry by helicopter from the Atago, was held at the defense minister's office starting about the noon of Feb. 19. About 10 senior officers, including the vice defense minister and the MSDF chief of staff, were present. The Defense Ministry had explained that the Maritime Staff Office informed the defense minister of the accident.

Ishiba said in the subcommittee meeting yesterday: "The questioning was conducted to enable the Defense Ministry to grasp the details of the accident as soon as possible and provide an explanation to external parties." But the ministry's questioning of the navigating officer had been held back for more than six days. It is becoming more suspicious that the Defense Ministry tried to cover up unfavorable facts for it.

It was before the JCG searched his house that the navigating officer moved from the Atago to Tokyo, so Masuda said: "There was no problem

legally." Even so, focusing on the fact that Maritime Staff Office members talked on the phone with Atago crew members for more than 3 hours late night of Feb. 19 without the permission of the JCG, some JCG members described such conversation as an act blocking the investigation by the JCG. Discontent with the Defense Ministry is growing in the JCG.

Information covered for eight and a half hours

The ministry's explanation about when the fishing boat was first spotted changed again and again. On the evening of Feb. 19, the ministry said it was two minutes before the collision. But on the evening of Feb. 20, the two minutes were changed to 12 minutes. Although Ishiba had received the altered information on the morning of Feb. 20, he held it back for eight hours and 30 minutes. Ishiba categorically said in a Lower House Security Council meeting on Feb. 22: "It should be natural for me to take responsibility if the ministry is found to have attempted to conceal the truth or falsify information." If suspicions increase that the ministry tried to conceal the truth, calls for Ishiba to resign will inevitably grow louder.

Moves for censure motion

In a press conference yesterday, Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda defended Ishiba, remarking: "Since it was just after the accident occurred, it was natural that the defense minister conducted questioning to find out what had happened as the minister in charge." But the prime minister also expressed his displeasure, saying: "He should have contacted the JCG. Even in the ruling camp, some members have begun to call for the defense minister's resignation.

Opposition parties are stepping up their attack against the defense chief about unauthorized questioning. Democratic Party of Japan Diet Affairs Committee Chairman Kenji Yamaoka criticized the questioning session held behind the scenes, saying: "It is suspected that the leaders (of the Defense Ministry) made a secret arrangement." House

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of Councillors members have begun to move to submit a censure motion against the defense minister.

(7) Atago chief navigator questioned for four and a half hours

YOMIURI (Page 3) (Abridged slightly)
February 28, 2008

It became clear before dawn of February 26 that the Ministry of Defense had transported by helicopter the chief navigator of the MSDF destroyer Atago, who was on duty until right before it collided with a small fishing boat, to the ministry for questioning on February 19. At that point, a week had passed after the accident. At that time, the MSDF Staff Office held a press conference in which a senior officer explained: "We did not obtain approval from the Japan Coast Guard (JCG)." About 20 minutes later, the officer corrected what he just announced, saying, "MSDF Yokosuka Headquarters notified the JCG about the transport." This has become MOD's official view. MSDF Chief of Staff Eiji Yoshikawa also emphasized to the press that afternoon that the force had obtained the endorsement of the JCG.

Later in the day, the Third Regional Japan Coast Guard Headquarters rebutted that it had not approved the transport of the chief navigator, shedding light on the conflicting views between the MSDF and JCG.

The MSDF's explanation on the duration of the questioning of the chief navigator also flip-flopped. The force initially explained that the questioning started at 10:00 a.m. and lasted about one hour. Nevertheless, it became clear from Vice-Defense Minister Kohei Masuda's press conference last night that the chief navigator had arrived at MOD shortly before 10:00 a.m. on Feb. 19 and stayed there until around 2:33 p.m. to undergo questioning by senior MOD officials.

MOD also initially announced that the Atago had first spotted the ill-fated fishing boat "two minutes before" the collision. But that, too, was changed to "12 minutes before," causing much confusion in the ministry.

Defense Minister Shigeru Ishiba also told the Liberal Democratic Party Defense Division meeting that started at 5:00 p.m. on Feb. 19, the day the collision occurred, that the Atago had spotted the fishing boat "two minutes before" the accident. But at around 8:00 p.m. that day, only three and a half hours later, Ishiba received fragmentary information that it was not "two minutes before." From 11 p.m. on Feb. 19 through 2:47 a.m. on Feb. 20, MOD asked by phone Atago crew members about the circumstances in order to verify the information. Ishiba learned at 8:30 a.m. on Feb. 20 that the MSDF destroyer had spotted the fishing boat "12 minutes before" -- verified information.

Despite that, Ishiba did not correct the information at the LDP Defense Division meeting that started at 5:00 p.m. on the same day. As a result, the mistaken "two minutes before" information was left uncorrected for a whole day.

(8) Twenty-first century equivalent of 1980s Maekawa (Structural Reform) Report: Risk factors of Japanese economy discussed at first experts panel meeting; Challenge to structural reform is government's ability to implement

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NIKKEI (Page 3) (Excerpts)
February 27, 2008

The Experts Panel on Structural Changes and the Japanese Economy, established under the government's Council on Economic and Fiscal Policy (CEFP), held its first meeting yesterday. Participants held discussions with an eye on how to reform the structure of the Japanese economy. They will vet risk factors of the Japanese economy seen in the financial system and the labor market amid power relationships in the world economy undergoing a sea change following the rise of newly emerging economies. Their aim is to map out a 21st century equivalent of the 1986 Maekawa Report, which called for shifting the structure of the economy to a domestic demand-led type. Since the Japanese economy is losing steam, the government will face the test of not only whether it can come up with an effective formula but also whether it can implement it.

At the outset of the meeting, State Minister for Economic and Fiscal Policy Hiroko Ota noted, "The Japanese economy needs scrutiny. I would like you to discuss measures that can enable Japan to achieve growth along with the world, which is growing dynamically."

The Cabinet Office during the meeting presented 11 items up for consideration, including reflecting the fruits (of structural reforms) in households and continuous creation of goods and services that address potential demands from consumers. Many panel members called for nurturing human resources acceptable to the international community and consolidating systems, laws and corporate accounting standards.

The Maekawa Report is a set of proposals for structural reforms compiled by a study panel headed by former Bank of Japan Governor Haruo Maekawa. It was issued in 1986 during the Nakasone cabinet. The Maekawa proposals were aimed at averting international criticism of Japan, which was amassing current profits through exports, as well as to cope with the strong yen.

The present international environment is more complex, as can be seen in the fact that the prices of resources are skyrocketing, following developing economies' sudden rise of power. On the domestic front, the declining population is working as a drag on growth. Deflationary pressure is also deep-rooted. Under such economic climate, the panel will discuss ways to put back the Japanese economy on growth track. It is expected to map out a report in June.

Japan must transmit its determination to fulfill its role as the

nation hosting the Lake Toya G-8 in Hokkaido. The report to be issued by the panel will offer a key test of whether the Fukuda administration can come up with economic policies with originality.

SCHIEFFER